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THE STORY TELLER.

From the Philadelphia Saturday Courier.

THE TWO SHAWLS AND THE TWO CARPET-BAGS.

BY MRS. CAROLINE ORNE.

Florence Lee was just taking the key from her pocket to lock her trunk, which had been carefully packed for a long journey, when a servant appeared at the door of her apartment, and handed her two small parcels and a note from Mrs. Hilton, her aunt, who resided about ten miles distant, in the city of New York. She opened the note, and read as follows:

"My Dear Florence—My friend, Mrs. Richmond, who resides within a few miles of Mr. Knollys, in whose family you have been invited to spend the autumn and winter, requested in her last letter that I would purchase her a Cashmere shawl. After examining every high-priced shawl in the city, I was fortunate enough to find one in season, I hope, to send by you, which I think will suit. Arthur Richmond, my friend's son, by whom I expected to send it, not having called, as was his intention, on his journey back from the Lakes. I likewise knowing that you have no shawl except what is getting rather shabby, purchased one for you, for which I gave twenty-five dollars, and which I beg you will do me the favor to accept. It is good and handsome for the price, though, of course, not to be compared with Mrs. Richmond's the price of which was one thousand dollars.

"Your Affectionate Aunt,
"MARGARET HILTON."

One of the shawls was done up with great care in the best kind of wrapping paper, and directed to Mrs. Augusta Richmond. The other was carelessly rolled up in a newspaper. Florence had no time to examine her shawl, for her brother, who was going to accompany her part way on his return to the University, called to her and told her that the stage was coming. Removing from her trunk some articles of no great consequence, she made room for the shawls one of which had cost treble the sum which had been expended on her whole wardrobe. In a minute afterwards, the stage-coach was at the door.

As the morning was fine, her brother preferred an outside seat, and Florence found herself in company with five strangers, four of whom were females, with nothing in their appearance either to attract or repel.

The fifth was a young man, with a face full of frank, open expression, and the handsomest—so Florence thought—that she had ever seen. Masses of rich, wavy hair shaded his broad, smooth forehead, and there was a sunny radiance in his hazel eyes, which illumined his whole countenance, and softened, without effacing, the somewhat laughy curve of his handsome mouth.

If the admiration of Florence was awakened, his did not slumber; though he had recently met the most celebrated belles at the different places of fashionable resort, and had, likewise, had opportunity to admire the loveliness of many of them in their own homes, where he was a most welcome guest.

Florence had just entered her nineteenth year, and a rich dazling complexion, and eyes bright and beautiful as a hawk's might have been charm enough of themselves, even if they had not given life and animation to features of faultless mould. It was evident, however, that she was by no means conscious that nature had been so liberal in bestowing upon her what has often proved a fatal dowry. She knew that she was better looking than most of her associates, but then in the fashionable world, which she had heard and read of, there were doubtless hundreds who would cast her into the shade. She, therefore, had no expectation of being an object of peculiar attraction to the youthful stranger, yet she did wish that she knew his name. Her curiosity, for the present, was destined to remain ungratified, while his, which was equally lively as regards herself, was only rewarded by ascertaining that her name was Florence, he hearing her brother address her when they stopped to exchange horses.

In the morning, as she and her brother were about to take leave of each other—their routes from that time lying in different directions—they were joined by Lewis Carey, one of young Lee's classmates. While conversing together, Carey suddenly exclaimed—

"There is Arthur Richmond you have heard me mention so often."

Following the direction of his friend's eyes, Lee perceived that the person alluded to was no other than their fellow passenger. Richmond, who now saw Carey, advanced to meet him, and, having previously learnt that Lee was a

brother to Florence, requested an introduction. This resulted in his being presented to Florence, a circumstance which added greatly to the enjoyment of both during the remainder of their journey.

When, towards sunset, the coach stopped at the head of an elm-shaded avenue that led to the house of Mr. Knollys, Richmond, as he assisted Florence to alight, remarked that Mr. and Mrs. Knollys were among his most valued friends, and that now he should have an additional motive for making an early call.

Florence, who in her hurry had merely glanced her eye at the name written on the envelope of the shawl, had not retained it in her memory, though her aunt had mentioned it in her note; but when she found that it was Mrs. Richmond, she concluded that her aunt's friend was the mother of the new acquaintance. As according to the note, Mrs. Richmond expected the shawl would be sent by her son, Florence requested Mrs. Knollys to permit one of the servants to convey it that evening, so that she might not be disappointed.

Florence, who had from childhood been an orphan, was welcomed with great kindness and cordiality; her mother having been a cousin of Mr. Knollys, and the dearest and most intimate friend of his wife. Their only child, a daughter, nearly the same age of Florence, and bearing the same name, had been dead several years, and it was her intention, though they had not disclosed it to a third person, for Florence Lee to supply her place, if, on trial, she realized the description given by her Aunt Hilton. The first impression was decidedly in her favor. She was as beautiful as their own lost Florence promised to be, and they were charmed with the union of grace, simplicity and good sense exhibited in her manners and conversation. Her dress, too, though her limited means did not permit it to be expensive, evinced good taste, both in material and arrangement. Florence, on her part was delighted with the fine house and highly cultivated grounds, and, above all, with Mr. and Mrs. Knollys.

In one corner of the room, which had once belonged to Florence Knollys, was a harp, whose golden wires had been swept by her hand, and in the rose-wood book-case were volumes on whose pages her eyes had last rested. Florence was capable of realizing the emotions which, in a greater or less degree, must have filled the breast of the parents, when, for the first time, memorials so sacred and so dear were appropriated to the use of another, and though she longed to awaken the slumbering music of the harp, she was restrained by feelings of delicacy. With the books, those silent companions, it was different, yet it was with a sensation of melancholy, amounting almost to awe, that she opened their leaves.

Arthur Richmond, who was a favorite of Mr. and Mrs. Knollys, did not forget to call. Florence looked much lovelier in the parlor than she did in the stage-coach, for her brown hair, brightened by a tinge of gold, and falling in a cloud of curls to her shoulders, was then concealed by her bonnet. Her hands, too, which must have been like those which some one has said poetry in them, were then covered with gloves, and her feet—feet, I believe, have poetry in them, too, sometimes—that just escaped being veiled by the drapery of her dress, and which must have felt as much at home in the Cinderella slippers as if they had been made on purpose, were then packed away with feet not worth looking at in the bottom of the coach.

Neither did the admiration with which Florence regarded Richmond, suffer any diminution during the interview, and each, at the moment of parting, might have said, with Juliet—

"This had of love, by summer's ripening breath,
May prove a beautiful flower when next we meet."

Mrs. Richmond, at the time Mr. Knollys' servant arrived with the shawl, was engaged in earnest conversation with her son. Imagining it to be a package of books, Mrs. Knollys had promised to lend her, she requested him to lay it on the table in the hall, and thought no more about it till after breakfast the next morning. She then recollected it, and, ordering it to be conveyed to the library, she herself followed. The moment she commenced opening it, she perceived that it could not contain books, and at the same time recognizing the handwriting to be Mrs. Hilton's she thought of the shawl.

Mrs. Richmond was not particularly fond of dress. Every woman, she said, who was strong enough to labor could, in a Republic like ours, flaunt in her silks and satins; but a thousand dollar Cashmere shawl—that was beyond the reach of cooks, waiting-maids, and even factory girls. She, therefore, made her shawl the badge of exclusiveness, and a self-complacent smile wreathed her laughy lip as she tore open the envelope. A single glance, and she dropped it upon the floor; while clasping her hands, she exclaimed—

"Is it possible! Black Flora would scarcely wear it!"

As the shawl struck the floor, a sealed note slipped from its folds, which, snatching up, she tore open and read. It was from her friend, Mrs. Hilton, who, after stating that the shawl, by the best judges, was considered a great bargain at a thousand dollars, went on to say that, as Arthur Richmond had not called, she ex-

pected, she had embraced the opportunity of sending it by Miss Lee, her niece, who was going to visit some friends in that vicinity.

After reading the note, she picked up the poor, despoiled shawl, and examined it more critically. No—she was not mistaken. If she could judge of nothing else, she could judge of a Cashmere shawl, and here was one for which Mrs. Hilton said she had paid a thousand dollars, which, at the most, could not be worth more than thirty. Her first decision was to write to Mrs. Hilton immediately, and ask an explanation. On reflection, however, she determined to call on the Miss Lee referred to in the note, who, she thought, might possibly throw some light on the affair. She concluded that the friends, Mr. Knollys and his wife, were the persons she had come to visit, it having been their servant who had brought the shawl. She was about to order the carriage, but was prevented by the arrival of a Mrs. Sedley and her daughter who had come to spend several weeks with her. Soon after the usual complimentary enquiries had been interchanged, Mrs. Richmond showed them the shawl, and read them Mrs. Hilton's note.

"Is this Mrs. Hilton a person worthy of implicit confidence?" said Mrs. Sedley, after examining the one and listening to the other.

"I have always so considered her," replied Mrs. Richmond. "I have indeed proved her to be in instances almost innumerable, for we have been on terms of friendship since early childhood."

"Then the person who sold her the shawl, finding she was ignorant of its quality, must have imposed upon her."

"But she was not ignorant of its quality—Had I not known that I could trust her judgment and taste with as much safety as my own, I certainly should not have requested her to purchase so valuable an article, and the only one appertaining to dress which I am very particular about."

Having tired themselves with conjectures, which were alike unsatisfactory, they dropped the subject for one less perplexing.

"I am glad," said Mrs. Richmond, the next morning to her son, "that Mrs. Sedley and her daughter happened to come while you were at home. Louisa is not only an heiress, but one of the most elegant girls I ever saw."

"That, my mother," he replied, "is because you have never seen the one I spent yesterday morning with. She is as superior to Miss Sedley as the evening star is to the light of a farthing candle."

"And what is the name of this peerless lady?"

"O, her name is Florence—a very sweet one is it not? Her other I shall not tell you, so that when an opportunity occurs to introduce her to you, you may be unbiased in your opinion by a knowledge of my partiality."

"I hope she has something to recommend her besides her personal advantages."

"You are thinking of her connections I suppose. They are, I assure you, equal in every respect to Miss Sedley's and if you think wealth should be a consideration to one so well provided for as Mrs. Richmond's only son, I believe I may safely say that she will have quite enough to satisfy all reasonable wishes."

"You will recollect Arthur," said his mother, "that as I cannot borrow your eyes, the young lady may appear very differently to me from what she does to you; but I shall not seek to thwart your inclinations, provided you have not been misinformed as to the respectability of her connections and some other particulars equally important."

"There can be no doubt but that you will be satisfied in every respect," replied Arthur, "as I received my information from a source that can be depended on."

"You are very sanguine," said his mother, "as all young men are apt to be in such cases. I hope, however, that you will not have the indiscretion to commit yourself before I have an opportunity of seeing and judging for myself."

"I shall make no promises," said Arthur laughing, "for really there is such a charming atmosphere floating about her, as may cause me to forget even your prohibition."

"You will not ride, this morning," said his mother.

"It is my intention to," he replied.

"It appears to me that you ought to give a little of your time to the entertainment of our guests. Towards night we will all take a drive in the carriage."

"I shall be at your and their service," said he, "but I cannot dispense with my ride this charming morning."

Five minutes afterwards he was on horseback. Wishing to satisfy his mother as respected Florence, he proceeded in a direction opposite that which would lead him to the house of Mr. Knollys, as after a short distance, he could avail himself of a cross road, which would soon enable him to turn his face the right way.

Mrs. Knollys being busy in her own room, had requested Florence to be in readiness to entertain any person who might chance to call, unless her presence was particularly desired.

After tea Mr. Knollys proposed a walk. It was a charming evening, though somewhat chilly, and Mrs. Knollys called to Florence as she was going for her bonnet, to be sure and put on a shawl. The mind of Florence had since her arrival been employed with subjects far too delightful and exciting to leave room for shawls, and it was not without a slight feeling of remorse, that she remembered that she had not even taken the one which her aunt gave her from its envelope. She now hastily undid it, and without stopping to examine it, lest she should keep her friends waiting, threw it over her shoulders.

"What a beautiful shawl," said Mrs. Knollys, as she assisted her to adjust its folds.

"Yes, it is rather pretty, I believe," said Florence. "It is one that Aunt Hilton gave me."

Mrs. Knollys examined the shawl more minutely—wondered within herself at Mrs. Hilton's extravagance, but made no further remark.

If there is an art in wearing a shawl, Florence was unconscious of it, yet if she had been and had made it a study, she could not have worn hers more gracefully. They had walked only a short distance, when a carriage appeared in sight, which Mr. Knollys remarked was Mrs. Richmond's.

The hurry of spirit into which this announcement threw Florence, heightened the color of her cheeks and made her fine eyes more lustrous, while obeying her first impulse, she turned with the intention to escape back to the house unobserved.

The attention of those in the carriage, as it slowly approached, was in the meantime, with the exception of Arthur's almost exclusively directed to Florence. His was divided between her and the effect produced on his mother's countenance by the sight of so much beauty and elegance. But instead of the expression of pleasure which he expected to see manifested, he saw by her compressed lip and flashing eyes, that she was contending with some angry emotion.

"Arthur," said she, "when they had arrived nearly opposite the little party of pedestrians, 'order the driver to stop.'"

Mr. and Mrs. Knollys immediately hastened forward to pay their respects to Mrs. Richmond, who was leaning from the carriage window. She received their civilities somewhat coldly, and then said to Mr. Knollys, "I wish to speak to that young woman. Please request her to step this way."

All were too much astonished at the strangeness of her request to make any remark, and Mrs. Knollys having mechanically obeyed her, introduced her as Miss Lee. Without taking the least notice of the introduction, "Young woman," said she, "I presume you are Mrs. Hilton's niece?"

"I am," replied Florence, trembling so violently that she could hardly stand, for she perceived that Mrs. Richmond was angry, and attributed it to what had passed between herself and Arthur in the morning.

"You of course then," said Mrs. Richmond, "did not expect to see me, or you would not have had the audacity to appear in your present dress."

Florence, in the utmost confusion, glanced her eye over her apparel, to detect, if possible, the impropriety which had elicited a remark as singular as it was impolite; but falling in her endeavors, she said to Mrs. Knollys with quivering lips and tearful eyes, "What is wrong?"

"What does she see?"

"I can see nothing amiss my child," said Mrs. Knollys soothingly, and added in a whisper, "I really believe she is insane."

Arthur had thus far looked on in silence, but, suspecting now, like Mrs. Knollys, that his mother's mind was disordered, he remarked that as it was growing late, he thought they had better return home.

"Your advice is uncalculated for," Mr. Richmond, said she, "but it shall be attended to, as soon as this Miss Lee will condescend to explain why she thought proper to retain the thousand dollar shawl Mrs. Hilton purchased for me, and to send me one in its place which is hardly fit to blanket my favorite saddle horse."

"I thought," said Mrs. Sedley, "that she evinced singular confusion, when Mrs. Knollys introduced her to you."

"So did I," said Louisa, "and it is not to be wondered at."

"There must be some mistake," said Mr. Knollys, speaking for the first time.

"There is—there is—sobbed Florence—Aunt Hilton sent me two shawls, one for Mrs. Richmond, the other for me, and she must have made a mistake in directing them."

"Will you condescend to inform me," said Mrs. Richmond, "whether Mrs. Hilton named the price of the shawl intended for you?"

"She did. She said it was twenty-five dollars."

"And you wish me to believe that you were so ignorant as to imagine the superb shawl you have on was purchased for that paltry sum?"

"It arrived too late for me to examine it before I commenced my journey," said Florence,

and since my arrival here, strange as it may appear, my time and thoughts have been so fully and so pleasantly employed, that I did not remove the paper that enclosed it, till preparing for my walk fifteen minutes ago; and even if I had, as I am totally unqualified to judge as to the value of such an article, it would not have occurred to me that there was any mistake, unless I had seen the two shawls together."

"Your answer is plausible," said Mrs. Richmond, "but it cannot deceive me. I will, however, write to Mrs. Hilton, and ask her if she thinks it possible that she could mistake a twenty-five dollar shawl for one worth a thousand dollars."

"Mother," said Arthur, "as Mrs. Hilton's mistake was undoubtedly the consequence of too much haste, it may be impossible for her to recollect any circumstance which will prove satisfactory, and I beg that you will suffer yourself to be guided in this matter, by your accustomed candor and generosity. Believe me, Florence Lee, is as incapable of what you accuse her as any person present, not excepting even yourself."

"In the heat of your vindication," said his mother, "you have inadvertently furnished me with the key to your zeal. Florence, if I mistake not, was the name of her, whom no longer ago than this morning, you described to me as a paragon, and truly I am of your mind."

"Mrs. Richmond," said Mr. Knollys, who had become angry at her pertinacity, "permit me to remind you that Florence Lee is under my protection, and till she can be proved guilty, I shall expect her to be treated as if she were innocent."

Florence, who found that it would be impossible for her to much longer control her feelings, so as to preserve an appearance of decent composure, had for the last few moments employed herself in hastily divesting herself of the shawl, which, having folded, she offered to Mrs. Richmond, begging her in a few broken words to receive it; but that lady proudly drawing herself back in the carriage, declined the request so humbly urged by a stiff inclination of her head. A drop will cause the full cup to overflow, and as Florence turned away from the proud, unyielding woman, Mr. Knollys, who noticed a change in her countenance, by a quick movement saved her from falling. Almost at the same moment, Arthur Richmond burst open the carriage-door, and throwing off the hand of his mother, which grasped his arm to detain him, sprang to Florence's side. She was perfectly insensible and her beautiful features pale and rigid, as if touched by the finger of death. As he assisted Mr. Knollys to convey her into the house, his mother called to him and said:

"Remember we are waiting for you. If you do not return in five minutes, we shall go without you."

She took out her watch, and as he had not left the house when the five minutes had expired, she ordered the driver to proceed without him.

Mrs. Richmond wrote to Mrs. Hilton, stating it to be her full conviction that the shawl had been exchanged by Florence. Florence likewise wrote to her aunt, and entreated her to communicate every circumstance, however trivial, which would possibly throw light upon the subject, as the only means of proving her innocence. One day after another wore away, after a sufficient time had elapsed for Mrs. Hilton to write, without bringing an answer either to Mrs. Richmond or Florence.

"Her niece is guilty," said Mrs. Richmond to Mrs. Sedley, "and she therefore dreads to write."

"O, I hope not," replied Mrs. Sedley; "and though she did not express it aloud, she certainly hoped that so rich a prize as Arthur Richmond would fall to her daughter."

Mrs. and Mrs. Knollys began to fear that Mrs. Hilton would be unable to make a satisfactory explanation, though they never for a moment regarded Florence with suspicion. As for Arthur, he was under the cloud of his mother's displeasure, for he frankly told her that he would not renounce Florence unless it was clearly proved that she was guilty.

Three letters from Mrs. Hilton came at last: one to Mrs. Richmond, one to Florence, and a third to Mrs. Knollys. After stating in the one last mentioned that she had delayed writing that she might thoroughly investigate the singular unhappy affair, she proceeded thus:

"I myself did up both of the shawls, and was very particular to enclose Mrs. Richmond's in smooth, strong paper. A note, addressed to her, was placed within the folds of the shawl. The one I intended for Florence was done up with much less care in a newspaper. I was, therefore, greatly perplexed when I received the letters from Mrs. Richmond and my niece; for though I entertained no suspicion of Florence, I knew that some person must have exchanged them. I felt the more unhappy by finding by the tenor of Mrs. Richmond's letter, that my opinion respecting my niece would have no weight with her unless supported by evidence. Suddenly, I recollected that soon after I had prepared them, I sent my waiting-maid to procure something in the apartment where I had left them, and that she remained so long that I became impatient. The moment I adverted to the shawls she betrayed confusion, but after employing all my ingenuity, I failed to elicit any-

thing at all conclusive. Knowing that during a visit of several weeks, which Florence had made me, the girl had become warmly attached to her, as a last resource I read her Mrs. Richmond's letter. After listening to it she burst into tears, and confessed that having great curiosity to examine and compare the shawls, having heard me mention the great difference in their price, she undid them for that purpose. While thus engaged, thinking that she heard some person ascending the stairs, she hastily refolded them, and, as she imagined, restored them to the right envelopes. Being afraid that in her hurry she had not tied them neatly, she sought an opportunity to return and examine them, when she found the note I had written Mr. Richmond lying upon the carpet. Rightly concluding that it had fallen from the shawl intended for that lady, she slipped it into the package marked with her name, without suspecting that she had exchanged the shawls."

The letter received by Mrs. Richmond, was substantially the same. Though she felt humbled in her own eyes by conceding an opinion which she had obstinately maintained, decency compelled her to admit that Florence was probably innocent. Had she possessed a mind truly generous and noble, she would not only have apologized for her unjust suspicion, but sought to make reparation by the delicate and unobtrusive attentions, which would have been understood and appreciated. The coldness of Mrs. Richmond, however, the less deeply affected the impudence of Florence, assured as she was of the love and confidence of Mr. and Mrs. Knollys, and of Arthur Richmond, who was seldom absent from their fire-side during the long autumn evenings.

Impossible as Mrs. Richmond would have avowed it to be, for the shadow of suspicion to fall upon one of her rank and position in society, an incident soon afterwards occurred, which placed her in a situation similar to the one Florence had been in, and which did more to show her the injustice she had been guilty of, than all that could have been said or written on the subject.

She had promised Mrs. Sedley and her daughter that she and her son would accompany them as far as the residence of Mrs. Overton, her sister, a distance which would include the first day's journey within about twenty miles. The friends took leave of each other at a thronged depot, and Mrs. Richmond and Arthur proceeded to Mrs. Overton's, a mile distant. Soon after their arrival, Mrs. Richmond unlocked a small carpet-bag which she had carried in her hand, for the purpose of procuring some article she wished to show her sister, when the first thing that presented itself was a high-priced embroidered handkerchief, carefully folded, and from which, on taking it up, slipped a purse well filled with gold.

"Why, these are not mine," said she; "how could they possibly get into my carpet-bag?—And here is a child's dressing, she added, examining still further."

"I think you must have exchanged carpet-bags with some person," said her sister.

On closer inspection, she found that the initials 'M. C.' were marked on the lock of the carpet-bag, and on one corner of the handkerchief 'Mary Crayton.'

"The contents are much more valuable than those of my own," said Mrs. Richmond. "It is strange that the owner should have been so careless as to exchange it, for I am certain that it was no mistake of mine—I never make mistakes."

"Here is your carpet-bag," said Arthur, at this moment entering. "I rolled it up in your cloak previously to depositing them in the carriage, and didn't know but you would think you had lost it."

Mrs. Richmond's opinion of her own infallibility had never been so shaken before. She felt really humble when she found that, for once, she had not only made a mistake, but one which might place her in a very unenviable predicament. As the best thing that could be done, Arthur took the carpet-bag and hastened back to the depot as fast as a good horse could carry him. When he arrived the cars were gone, but there was a group of persons, among was a lady holding a little girl by the hand, gathered around the man who drove the carriage which had conveyed him and his mother to Mrs. Overton's.

"Did they appear to be persons of respectability?" Arthur heard the lady ask him.

"O yes, mamma, quite respectable," he replied.

"Well, there's no knowing anything by that now-a-days," said one of the bystanders.

"No, indeed," said another. "You say you are sure that the woman had one carpet-bag in her hand, and that you saw the corner of another peeping out of a cloak they had wrapped it up in?"

"Yes, but I should have thought nothing about it, if this lady had not lost hers, and I then began to think that it did look rather odd to see it wrapped up so snug."

The attention of both speakers and hearers had been too much absorbed for them to take any particular notice of Arthur, who now approached, somewhat nervous, enquired if any person present had lost a carpet-bag.

"I have lost one," said the lady before alluded to, stepping forward.

"This is probably the one, then," said he, presenting that which he held in his hand.

